

# 2025 Early Childhood Legislation FAQ

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## **Early Childhood Continuum of Care**

### **Why was this bill proposed?**

Many Iowa families have adults working outside the home and need full-day care, or continuum of care, for their child(ren).

Funding for full-day preschool and child care options include:

- Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP)
- Shared Visions Preschool Programs (Shared Visions)
- Child Care Assistance (CCA) for licensed child care centers
- Partnerships with the new Early Childhood Continuum of Care grants

These, in coordination with other early childhood system partners and services, offer a wealth of choice and personalization to Iowa's families.

### **When do you anticipate that the grant opportunity will open?**

The Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant opportunity is intended to be open for the 2025-2026 school year. We will share timelines as the bill progresses through the legislature.

### **Will the number of Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP) providers grow?**

We expect so.

Preschool providers interested in becoming SWVPP community-based providers should review the requirements for implementation and reporting.

Applicants who are able to meet the program assurances and requirements will be approved to receive state funding for enrolled four-year-old children.

### **For the COC grant, do you know why "Applicants may not serve in both preschool and child care roles to receive an award"?**

Early Childhood Continuum of Care grants require a partnership between SWVPP providers and child care facilities to ensure both of these important roles remain intact and available to their communities.

### **Our district created a licensed Early Childhood Center. If SWVPP is also provided by the school district, would we be allowed to apply for the COC grant?**

The Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant requires an SWVPP provider as well as a licensed child care center to partner and provide 10 hours of care per day, with at least 10 hours per week being SWVPP.

If the school district and early childhood center are operated by different entities, they may be eligible to partner and apply for the Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant.

**Will SWVPP providers still have to partner with a public school district?**

Current SWVPP partners may continue existing partnerships with school districts, or they may apply directly to the Iowa Department of Education for approval to offer SWVPP independently as a community-based provider.

**What guarantee is there that federal funds will continue to be received with current plans to eliminate the federal Department of Education? Are federal funds based upon this plan going to be there?**

At this time, we are operating under "status quo" funding.

**If community providers are not able to meet the requirements for SWVPP will they be at a disadvantage this grant cycle?**

Timelines for grant and program approval processes are dependent on various legislative processes. It is the intent of Iowa Department of Education to have all types of preschool programming operational for Fall 2025.

Entities interested in becoming a SWVPP community-based provider should review the requirements for implementation and reporting.

Applicants who are able to meet the program assurances and requirements will be approved to receive state funding to enroll four-year-old children.

**Will it be a requirement that lead teachers must be licensed to qualify for Shared Visions and SWVPP?**

SWVPP and Shared Visions will continue to require compliance with preschool program standards and assurances. Having a licensed teacher will be a program assurance and requirement for both SWVPP and Shared Visions, which are operated under the authority of the Iowa Department of Education.

**Can our child care center offer 4-year-old preschool and get funding without a school district involved?**

Yes, a child care center can either apply directly to the state or partner with their local school district to become a SWVPP provider. Both pathways would allow the SWVPP provider to receive state funding for each enrolled 4-year-old.

However, in order to be eligible for the Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant there must be two separate entities with one being a SWVPP provider and the other being a licensed child care center.

**What if a school district wants to work with multiple centers?**

Any SWVPP provider may submit up to three joint applications for an Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant with interested licensed child care centers.

Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant participants may receive a maximum of \$300,000 per year.

**How much total money is available for this grant and how many awards will be made?**

\$16 million is available for the Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant. The number of grants awarded will depend on the number of applicants and the amount they apply for. Maximum grant awards of \$100,000 with an annual cap for each entity of \$300,000.

**What is the definition of "full-day care" within the Continuum grants?**

A full day is a minimum of 10 hours per day with at least 10 hours per week being SWVPP.

**Can the COC fund a start-up childcare program in that school or community?**

Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant allowable uses are wages and transportation.

**How does Head Start fit into this new landscape?**

Head Start grantees and their comprehensive services are integral to Iowa's early childhood system. All Head Start programs are encouraged to consider their options to provide SWVPP, Shared Visions and/or child care opportunities in their regions and communities.

## **Shared Visions**

**Will 4 yr old Shared Visions Preschool Programs continue to be supported?**

In SFY26, all at-risk funding, which supports Shared Visions, will be focused on Shared Visions grants. This will increase access to preschool opportunities for young children and their families.

**How are Shared Visions funds going to be used through the COC grant?**

At-risk funding, which supports Shared Visions programs, **will NOT** be used for Early Childhood Continuum of Care grants.

SFY26 at-risk funding will be used exclusively for grants that support Shared Visions.

**With the elimination of the Child Development Coordinating Council (CDCC), where will stakeholder / parent input land?**

Early childhood programs gather family and stakeholder input as part of implementation of preschool program standards, specifically those including evaluation activities.

SWVPP providers and Shared Visions grantees must implement program standards, which will incorporate these activities in their program review routines and practices.

**If you are pulling the roughly \$703,000 from Shared Visions Parent Support funding, is there a plan to replace these funds with other funds?**

100% of the at-risk funds remain available for grants that will now focus strictly on Shared Visions. Parents can be referred to ECI home visiting programs and HHS early intervention and support services for parent support.

**While up to \$100,000 in grant funding can be used for transportation and/or staffing, will this be enough to cover a child care center's lost revenue due to students choosing to attend SWVPP programs?**

While expanding access to SWVPP is a goal, the Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant is intended to ensure that child care facilities are not losing enrollment to alternative proposals, such full-day district preschool.

Licensed child care centers will have additional opportunities for funding:

- Partnerships with SWVPP providers to become eligible for the Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant
- Becoming a SWVPP community-based provider and receive per pupil funding from the state for every enrolled 4-year-old.

## **Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) Districts**

**Why are we aligning with the behavioral health districts when this isn't really about behavioral health?**

The district map for Iowa was created using a data-driven approach to ensure effective service delivery and equitable access to care for areas beyond just behavioral health. Key criteria included areas of high need, access to care, and city and county boundaries. Publicly available data, such as the primary care physician ratio (HRSA), dentist ratio (HRSA), mental health provider rate (HRSA), social vulnerability index (CDC) and Iowa Medicaid member rates were used in the development of the map. Aligning with the established behavioral health districts provides an opportunity to reduce administrative duplication and streamline contracts. Many local areas contract with the same providers which creates duplication and varied reporting requirements.

**How will the new move to consolidate local boards to a district approach ensure that there is equal representation at the district level to prevent local discretionary funding from being given to areas with more representation at the district level?**

Community plans, budgets and local decisions for investments will continue to be reviewed and approved with intentional recognition of serving populations across each

district. Additionally, there will be representation from across the district on the local ECI board.

**I heard that the new district boards would need ONE elected official from the large district. How do we ensure that the urban and metropolitan needs of the districts aren't overshadowing rural perspectives and interventions?**

ECI will continue to evaluate the needs of families across the ECI district. New district plans need to be developed to improve access to services for families within rural populations. Additionally, there will be representation from across the district on the local ECI board.

**What is the timeline on the switch?**

The current legislation proposes Early Childhood Iowa will move towards a district geography by January 1, 2026.

**Given that 2 of the 7 proposed districts contain 61% of the state's population, what is the proposed formula for staffing these new districts?**

Each proposed district will have an initial plan for primary staffing roles including:

- Lead District Director
- Lead Family Support Home Visitation Service Coordinator
- Lead Community Collaboration Coordinator
- Lead Early Childhood Continuum of Care Coordinator

The citizen-led ECI district board will procure for services to be implemented by awarded subcontractors to meet the needs of various populations.

**Early Childhood Iowa Discretionary Fund**

**Is there a rationale for shifting funding away from Iowa's prenatal to three-year olds and towards four-year-olds?**

Local ECI districts continue to have local discretionary dollars to invest in prenatal to three-year-old programs in their communities.

**What is the amount of investment for the services CCDF will now cover?**

**\$5 million** of CCDF contributed to the Early Childhood Continuum of Care grants.

**\$2.5 million** of CCDF utilized to provide statewide support for Child Care Nurse Consultants (CCNCs) currently funded by ECI.

**\$3.5 million** (approximately) of CCDF utilized for child care workforce training, incentive programs, and additional consultants through Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) currently funded by ECI.

**Some ECI boards were funding Child Care Wage Supplements & Incentives. Will the Child Care Bureau cover this now?**

No. CCDF is not a continued funding source for child care wage supplements and incentives that are occurring in local ECI areas. The statewide and regional solutions fund initiative can offer funding for wage supplements. Local ECI district boards will continue to have local discretionary dollars to fund community initiatives.

**What does "prioritize local investments" mean? Will funding be contingent on match?**

Investments in early childhood services with continued performance measures demonstrating positive outcomes best supporting children and families will be prioritized. Match requirements were not discussed.

**Will group-based parent education programs, like NEST, still have a place with ECI funding?**

Group-based parent education programs may continue to be funded by local discretionary funds.

**How will youth receiving these services be found to be in imminent risk of placement?**

The funds discussed during the webinar are dedicated for early childhood services for children aged 0-5 and their families. A comment regarding youth was made regarding a big picture vision for collaborative conversations within communities to support families overall. Local community collaboration is always needed to determine how all partners can support local needs.

**Will passage of this bill impact AEA's Early ACCESS programs?**

Early ACCESS is federally funded via the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C and is not affected by this proposed legislation.

**What does "local boards" mean?**

At a local level, there are currently 34 citizen-led boards that will transition to 7 local district boards. Local ECI district boards will continue to meet expectations established in [Iowa Code 256I](#).

**Will performance measures be similar to previous years, or new performance measures?**

The ECI State Board approves the performance measures aligned to their approved service types. There are no significant changes to performance measures anticipated at this time.

**Does the funding that will be used to draw down new federal funding for home visitation services utilize existing ECI funding and is that planned as discretionary for FY26?**

The ECI State Board approves the funding formula for distribution of funds to the local ECI districts. The ECI State Board is considering a proposal to reserve up to \$10,000,000 for evidence-based family support programming. A federally approved community pathway for maximizing IV-E funds from the Family First Act is under review for approval.

**How will you ensure that there won't be an interruption in services for families if existing providers are selected? Will funding decisions be made in time for transitioning, etc.?**

Annually local ECI boards review their available funds and carry-forward balances, procure for services and plan for contract awards, and propose a budget to the state for their proposed services they'd like to fund. This process isn't changing as a result of legislation. Services and corresponding performance measures must align with the ECI State Board approved [Statewide Performance Measures \(Tool O\)](#).

**If this bill passes, how will preschool children continue to receive services such as the Preschool Fluoride Varnish program?**

Dental services are still an approved local service option that local ECI boards can fund with local discretionary dollars. Early Childhood Iowa discretionary funds are not the only funding stream available to support dental services.

**Where can we access the ECI State Board-approved list of services?**

[Statewide Performance Measures \(Tool O\)](#) provides the list of ECI State Board approved services.